

Becoming Christians

Prayers and subject formation in an urban church in China

Prayers in Christianity are often considered to be a theological or pastoral topic; while social scientific studies generally tend to reduce them, like prayers in other religious contexts, to the status of psychological responses bringing comfort to the practitioner, or a collective construction connected with social and cultural institutions. However, what prayer actually is, and what it means to Christians who practise it remains an open issue for further, more intensive and thorough study. Based on fieldwork in an urban church in China, this article provides some perspectives on contemporary Chinese Christians and their prayer life, attempting to elaborate its possible significance, especially in terms of subject-formation processes within these Christians. Meanwhile, this article argues that, in working towards a better understanding of Christians, it is more efficacious to take 'Christians' as those who are, rather than a given or acquired identity, or a status of being, engaged in a process of becoming through a practice, or set of practices, which in this case is prayer. Moreover, in the case of this Chinese Christian church, the practise of prayer also indicates some reflections on the cultural and religious diversity of contemporary Chinese society.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY, one question that cannot be avoided in any social scientific research is how to define the 'Christian' group. Just as with 'Christianity',¹ the ways of identi-

fying a 'Christian' may be various. When it comes to official data, the *Annual Report on China's Religions 2010* (Jin and Qiu 2010) estimates that the number of Christians in China is 23.05 million; while according to the estimate of Yu Jianrong, Director of the Social Issues Research Centre at the CASS Rural Development Institute, the number of Chinese Christians is no smaller than 50 million (Cao 2010: 22). These statistical differences mainly result from varied estimates of the populations of numerous unofficial churches in China.

Meanwhile, in terms of Christianity itself, it is a subtle matter to distinguish between faith seekers and Christians. In theory, whether one is Christian depends on whether 'faith' exists and whether it is great or not. But in reality, being baptized is still an important basis upon which many churches select their members. Only baptized Christians can receive the Holy Communion and participate in the ministry of a church. Naturally only those who have been baptized can become preachers or be ordained as pastors. Here we come to the point of the relationship between Christians and the Church. Churches in China generally put much emphasis on a Christian's commitment to a particular church, usually the one he has been baptized in. Being baptized in a church means being committed to this church, though this

2013); or they take 'Christianity' as homogeneous entirety and explore how it arises, develops, declines and transforms in one location, thereby generating numerous studies centring on 'Christianity and Chinese Society' (Zhang X. 2009, Wu 2002, Huang 2012, Zhang and Tang 2013). Generally, these two approaches cover most of the empirical studies of Christianity.

1 Studies of the sociology of religion and the anthropology of religion in Christianity in China usually focus on the Church as an institution, namely, discussing how it participates in political, economic and social life (Leung 1999, Liu 2009, Huang 2012, Cao

is more of a Church teaching and not necessarily reflected in the actual life of believers. Moreover, many churches do not encourage their members to transfer to others arbitrarily, unless there is a significant change in daily life or an obvious variance with the church in question. Those who claim themselves to have Christian faith, but are not committed to any church or involved in church life, are often labelled as 'cultural Christians' by churches, which implies a great deal of dubiousness about their level of faith. In terms of this attitude, we can distinguish between the emphasis on church life (which stems from some doctrines) and the stress on the commitment to a church (which is no doubt aimed at a specific church).

However, it is undeniable that current discussions of Christianity usually centre on various churches in China while the discussions of Christians are often aimed at the Christians that belong to different churches in real life. In China's social context, it is difficult to find the traces of different Christian denominations, but distinctions between churches, as well as the divisions based on the faith traditions that churches practise, do exist and sometimes are particularly evident. However, these divisions seem to be as such too vague and strongly random to form the basis of an academic discussion.

Under such circumstances then, how may we define a 'Christian' for our academic purposes and how are we to understand the formation of 'Christian' groups? A commonly occurring discussion concerns the 'identity' and 'identity construction' of Christians. By means of a series of rituals and a subsequent standardization of interpretations and actions, Christians distinguish themselves from 'others'. Both in the internal self-construction and the external construction which occurs by means of distinguishing I and Others, Christian identity is a function of a social and historical process. Christian identity is something that needs to be affirmed and sustained through effort; therefore, religious practices in Christianity such as prayer, acts of worship, Bible reading and so on, have all been integrated, in everyday life, into this social process of consolidating 'identity'. However, for Christians, obtaining the social 'identity' of a Christian is not completely equivalent to the status of being a 'Christian'. The growth of spiritual life, spurred on by prayer, Bible reading and other forms of devotion, is rather a process of forming subjectivity than of acquiring an objectified social 'identity'.

To make the exploration of the subject-formation process practical, the approach of studying the prayers practised by Christians in particular Christian churches is a possibility. In general, prayers in Christianity are often thought of as a theological or pastoral topic (Rahner 1993, Shannon 2001); while social-scientific studies generally tend to reduce them, like other religious prayers, to psychological responses which bring about comfort, or collective constructions associated with social and cultural institutions.

However, what prayer is, and what it means to the Christians who practise it remains an open question, which could be the subject of further, and more intensive and thorough study. Interestingly, in 1909, in his unfinished dissertation on prayer, Marcel Mauss tried to give a concrete definition of prayer from a social-scientific perspective (Mauss 2003). Joel Robbins (2001) investigates the language and prayer of Christians in Papua New Guinea and makes a very interesting statement that God is nothing but talk. More recently, Tanya Luhrmann (2012) provides a serious and sharp observation on American Evangelical prayer life in her interesting book *When God Talks Back*. In these significant works of the social science of prayer, one common emphasis is that prayers are something more than merely texts with holy meanings: they constitute a practice involving language which is vocal, interlocutory and reflexive. Returning to the process of subject formation, language is a vital factor; language especially distinguishes the first-, second- and third- positions for the 'I' to come into reality.

Therefore, based on fieldwork in an urban church in China, we aim to provide some perspectives on contemporary Chinese Christians and their prayer lives, attempting to elaborate their possible significance, especially in terms of subject-formation processes within these Christians. Meanwhile, this article argues that towards a better understanding of Christians, it is more efficacious to think of 'Christians' as being part of a process of becoming through practice, which in this case is prayer; rather than a given or acquired identity, or a status of being. The ultimate issue here is that if what one does defines who one is, these two are the same thing in essence.

Moreover, in the discussion above, Christians in China are taken as a unified group which shares the same ideas and practices in church affairs and devotional activities. But, this may not be an accur-

ate picture of the real situation. Only some of the churches in China have a specific theological tradition, or belong to a particular religious sect. Home churches, especially ones in rural China may follow a pragmatic rather than a theological, rationale in how they arrange rituals and Sunday worship, including prayers. Given this, the urban church that is examined in this article is a far from typical example of 'Chinese Christianity': on the contrary it illustrates its diversity. However, in analysing the prayers which are offered up in this church, the division between the collective and the individual also emerges in through language and texts. As the article elaborates on the practice of prayers, this division points to the different positions both within Chinese Christians themselves and their churches.

Subject formation of Christians

In his review of anthropological studies of Christianity, Robbins mentions that when we talk about 'Christians', the object of study should be shifted from those 'defined' as Christians to those 'claiming themselves to be' Christians (Robbins 2014: 166). Here we come to the point of a Christian's self-consciousness, which is exactly this article's focus; the process of subject formation.

The word 'subject' in this article needs to be distinguished from the term 'ego', which is applied in psychology, especially in psychoanalysis. The concept of 'ego' refers to a mediating principle between the *id* and reality; a form of self-status which often involves an internal examination of an individual's own state. However, the Christian 'subject' discussed in this article is not a purely internal entity. On the one hand, this 'subject' is self-conscious. It is not generated or acquired through sermons in a church or a certain type of spiritual training. It is not a product of social acquisition, but rather emerges inside individuals. The reason for such an emergence may be described by Christians in terms of 'vocation', 'inspiration' or 'the work of the Holy Spirit'. One thing to be noted is that similar expressions are not necessarily found in every Christian's narrative. Actually, many Christians whom Hu Mengyin has interviewed are honest about the fact that they do not have such an experience at all. Further discussion of this self-conscious subject, especially concerning whether it exists and why it occurs, will lead us to greater complexity. As with the discussions concerning Christians' spiritual

conditions, this complexity presents a knotty problem for social science. Among the many studies of Christianity in China, we can see relevant examples of this, such as Wu Fei's confusion about the differences between Catholics in Duanzhuang and the villagers who practise traditional religions (Wu 2002). Another example is Cao Nanlai's study of Wenzhou, in which he sets out to talk about how modernity is embodied in these Christians, especially the 'Boss Christians' (Cao 2013). All of these works take Christians as subjects of practices, and the process of subject formation may be a supplementary new perspective to contribute to this topic.

On the other hand, the 'subject', after its emergence, is no longer entirely a 'self-status'. The 'subject' is always connected with the process of objectifying the world, making it cognizable and meaningful. As argued above, to discuss and fully represent the emergence of Christian subjectivity can be very difficult. However, at the same time, for each individual Christian, the 'subject' cannot be simply inferred as being 'existent' or 'non-existent' but only in terms of a gradual process of becoming. Representations of this process usually refer to a variety of means of devotion, religious practices which obviously overlap with the operations of 'identity construction'. Yet subject formation is also related to the establishment or intensification of the relationship between Christians and others, between subjects and objects. Jacques Lacan points out the link between the subject and the Other: 'the fact that the Other is, for the subject, the locus of his signifying cause merely explains why no subject can be his own cause' (Lacan 2005: 713). The 'Other' here not only indicates an epistemological distinction between subject and object, but also the distinction between the human and God. In fact, these religious practices, or spiritual exercises, to a large extent involve establishing a relationship with God or other kinds of non-human spirit, rather than an ethical system for individual minds and behaviour. Christianity has, though ascetic been far from a reclusive and otherworldly (*weltfuchtige*) religion², from the very beginning. The emphasis both on

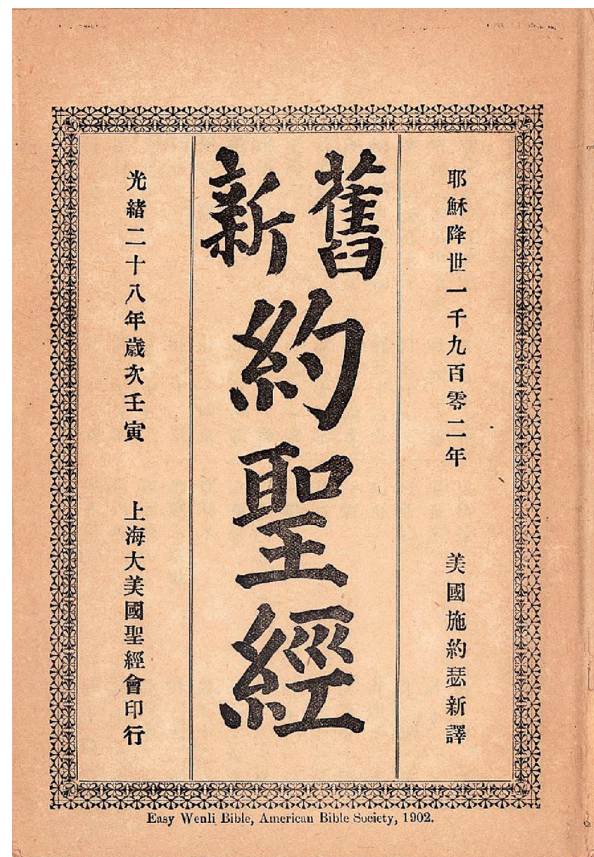
- 2 From the fourth century when Catholic Monasticism emerged, to the eve of the Protestant Reformation, monasticism was very popular. Therefore, what we want to show is the focus and emphasis of Christianity on the real world, even if its start and end are within the holy world of its own.

commitment to a church in practice and the stress on a relationship with God in its doctrine impacts upon the process of subject formation. At the same time, the end of this continuous process is also both practical and doctrinal, resulting in the emergence and complement of a 'Person' in Christianity. And for every Christian himself, it involves the imagination of a 'future self' and how to approach this. Theoretically, it is a lifelong journey. However, one way we can expect to gain an insight on this issue is to explore how the subject redefines and adjusts its relationships with the surrounding world; the continuous subject positioning itself in the present context. These Christian subjects constantly refine and integrate their positional relationship between themselves and Others. This positional relationship is not only characterised by varieties of intensity and distance, but also by certain directions and hierarchical relations. In other words, subject positioning is a process of renovating or completing a certain type of 'order', cosmologically and socially.

Prayer and devotion

Although the emergence of the subject – the way it becomes 'self-conscious' – is still suspended, we may notice how corresponding practices function in the process of subject positioning, and aim towards a realization of the final 'person'. In Christianity, the most ubiquitous religious practices, or what we call 'devotions', may include prayer, Bible reading, fellowship and so on. Among them, prayer is most suitable for our study of the process of subject formation. On the one hand, in most cases, prayer is a spontaneous, oral expression. The words and speeches of which prayer is composed are symbols and indexical signs with personal features. On the other hand, prayer can be easily rendered into texts which can be analysed. Bible readings are limited to the Bible itself, while it is difficult to render the experience of fellowship into accurate and operable texts. Linguistic studies of 'subject' and 'object' are numerous. Even the main part of Lacan's discussion of the 'subject' is in the dimension of language (Huo 2014). This article will not be a linguistic discussion, but does involve a number of prayer texts. Therefore, Lacan's discussion provides a starting point for studying the process of subject formation through prayer.

Meanwhile, as an anthropological study, this article has a field site as its direct source of prayer texts.



Chinese Bible, translated by Bishop Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky, published in 1902. National Library of Australia.

The field site of this article is a Protestant church, Church H, in City B in northern China. Church H is an unofficial church with approximately 300 members in total. About 200 of them attend Sunday services regularly. Its members are divided into small fellowships for activities such as Bible study during the week. Before the Sunday act of worship, there is a prayer meeting involving approximately 40 participants. Besides this, prayer requests are listed in the weekly notices. In fact, Christian prayer does not follow an exact instruction, but is rather arbitrary. Generally, prayers can be classified into two categories; namely, prayers of rite and prayers of petition. A prayer of rite takes the form of a fixed setting; although its details and length may vary, it occurs regularly. A typical example in everyday life is saying grace before meals. The thanksgiving offered by a pastor at Holy Communion can also be seen as a prayer of rite. Petitionary prayer does not have a fixed pattern and the details often involve specific issues. It may be personal and it may also occur on

public occasions such as at fellowship meetings. The prayer texts obtained in Church H are mostly prayers of petition, but they also include some prayers of rite. Another thing to be discussed is that quite a number of the Christian prayer speeches can be seen to be following particular 'formulae'. Prayer speech has a fixed narrative structure and paragraphing format. Nor are these texts totally oral in nature. Sometimes the discursive logic of narration may even be quite different from that of ordinary conversation. Therefore, prayer cannot simply be seen as a daily, verbal expression, but rather as a 'formula'. The following three segments of prayer speech will be used to analyse the strengthening of the 'subject', subject positioning and the concretization of the 'Person' in the process of subject formation.

Lord, we thank you. Lord, we praise you.
 Lord, truly you alone are worthy of all praise.
 Lord, because you are worthy, you created the universe and the Lord Almighty upholds it.
 Lord, you love those sinners and you laid down your life for us. It was your only son who laid down his life for us. Lord, we thank you. Lord, the people dwelling in the shadow of death fear no more. We carry the sufferings of the world on our shoulders, but in Christ we have peace.
 Lord, we thank you. We who serve you as our Lord enter your temple of freedom and those who suffer have peace. Lord, thank you for comforting our crushed spirit. Lord, thank you for cleansing all our sins. Lord, you are worthy of our praise. Lord, those who receive grace praise you. We always praise you.

This is a prayer of rite performed in the context of a Sunday act of worship, mainly concerned with thanking and praising God. In Christianity, thanksgiving and praise exist in almost all types of prayer. It might be as short as a sentence. For instance, 'Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you'. Or a large segment of detailed description, including quotes from Psalms in the Bible. This commonly used beginning actually could be seen as an 'exclamation' or a 'salutation'. When Christians put themselves in a conversation with God, this salutation not only literally refers to calling out God's name (in fact, people must not call out God's name in the Jewish tradition), but also making a sentence (or segment) of declaration. That is to say, this kind of thanksgiving or praise is more

than simply an expression of emotion, but the confines of a relationship. In other words, in the very beginning of a prayer, the relationship between man and God is already clearly stated. In this way, the core of the Christian faith (God) is confirmed and the subject is strengthened.

As Lacan puts it, subject formation is dependent on the principle of the Other. In Christianity, the subject directly stems from the Christian's relationship with God. Man has a clear position relative to God and creation or sinners. And encountering the world he lives in, man is the dominator. In the continuous objectifying process (whether God can be objectified and cognized remains an unanswered question), we can interpret the 'subject' in detail as a certain concept. In such declarations Christians do not 'acquire' the identity of a 'created thing' or a 'sinner'; instead, they admit that they are a 'created thing' or a 'sinner'. Therefore, the consciousness or strengthening of the 'subject' of the Christian is completed in this sense.

Abba Father, thank you for giving us the precious Bible passage. Thank you for revealing to us your perfect and good will that is laid up for us. God, we pray that you make us a family in Christ so that our church will not become an organization, but the household of God. Lord, may you bless this church and everyone inside here. Help us to build your household with one heart in your sweet and perfect love. Help us to enter each other's life in this real-life discipline of mutual love and mutual commitment. Help us to be spiritual partners and brothers and sisters. Lord, we pray that you will particularly bless the brothers and sisters among us who are weak and we pray that more of us will be inspired by the Holy Spirit so that we can see the needs of brothers and sisters. As for their needs, help us to see our responsibilities. May the love of the Lord be among us. May the truth and way of the Lord be among us.

This is a prayer by a pastor for the whole church. In this prayer, the relationship between church members and how they are supposed get along with each other are emphasized. In the process of the subject formation, the most important link is not simply consciousness of the 'subject', but through the continuous subject positioning to link the internal concept of 'subject' to the real-life practice as the theological

or doctrinal positional relationship has already been confirmed. Therefore, the ultimate representation of the 'Person' is not only the internal state of an individual, but a real-life state with practical meaning. The subject positioning is to establish and identify the relationships between the subject and Others in various forms by relative positions. In this prayer, what is stressed by the pastor is not merely the relationship between Christians within the church, but he also repeatedly mentions 'in Christ' and 'in His love' and afterwards he mentions 'love of each other' and 'mutual commitment'. This indicates that Christians firstly need to place the 'subject' in a position which is in Christian terms, 'in the Lord' or 'in Christ'. On that basis, the relationship with other Christians within a church could be established properly since they can all be settled in the right places.

One thing to be clarified is that the relationships we are talking about here are positional ones, in a very abstract way and only in the discursive context. Personal relationships among church members are not exactly the same thing here. Yet this subject positioning can indeed be transformed into a re-integration, in which the forms of relationships involved are less important than the stress on the 'subject' itself.

Lord Jesus, we are truly thankful to you. Thank you for bringing us sinners before the presence of God. We sinners are not worthy of God's love indeed. But God had mercy upon us and accepted us and he even gave us his only Son. God turned our weakness into strength and softened the hardness of our hearts. God, I am a sinner. My heart is hard. I'm proud of what I'm good at and I'm extremely arrogant. Although before your presence, I call out to you: God, make me humble so I will rely on you wholeheartedly and give all glory to you. God, after exiting from the wilderness and entering the Promised Land, man's stumbles follow hard at heel. God, man is really weak and prone to Satan's attacks. God, I am proud of myself, thinking that I have been close to you and glorified your name. But I don't realize that I have been tempted. It is Satan that makes me unable to recognize the path under my feet and even unable to know you. God, although I was baptized a few years ago, I don't know that I am truly a sinner and I didn't have a real repentance. I don't realize that I could do things that

rebel against God in every minute and I need your strength to sustain and save me. I call myself righteous but I haven't realized that I have been an unrighteous person long ago. God, please make me stumble and look at myself. God, take everything from me and show me my heart and I'll see the unrighteousness within me and how I align myself with Satan, bringing disgrace to God's name. God, I need your salvation. God, you do save me with your great power. You not only help me to stand again, but also completely save my soul, making me wail and repent before your presence. God, you also completely accept me so I as an unworthy sinner could return to you. God, you not only lead me to the Promised Land, but also make me confess my sins and repent. It is difficult to speak of your faithfulness and love in words. We return to you, God. You are precious and give us what goes beyond our expectations. God, in this world I only depend on you, relying on your mercy and power, your faithfulness and love. Lord, I will praise you always so that I can live out your life and stay away from Satan's temptations. I entrust all in your hand. We expect your guidance and praise you.

This is a confessional prayer from a Christian. As such it is a typical prayer of petition and it is highly personal. Of course, in prayer, personal features are still presented through Christian words. This prayer refers to another kind of subject positioning which is different from the previous one, identifying the relationship with the devil, or Satan in the text. In the world of Christianity, Satan is a special being. On one hand, it takes all the narratives into a dualistic discourse of 'good' and 'evil' as it is the most visible symbol of 'evil', although Christianity itself, as a monism, never accepts such a dualistic discourse. On the other hand, it cannot be integrated into the world of human beings as a part of the correct order of things according to God's wish. Therefore, the objectification of Satan, or the devil, is not similar to the objectification of God and the world humans live in. In a broader sense, the spirit world is always an exception in the Christian cosmology and order. Thus, identifying the relationship between the human subject and Satan is distinguishing between two different orders, one relating to God and the other to a spirit world. However, it is quite ambiguous for the subject

to have a full vision of such a distinction, since the objectifying of Satan or the spirit world itself is full of uncertainty and unpredictability.

Comparing the third prayer text with the first one, when the 'subject' is 'being a sinner', it reveals to us the end of subject formation; the meaning of 'Person' is actually a 'sinless person' or 'righteous person'. In fact, for Christians, the process of subject formation does not really have a specific destination, or a reachable end. The ultimate sanctification is concretized through a repeated stress on the Christian Subject and the subject-positioning process. Therefore, confessional prayer is an effort to become 'sanctified' or 'sinless' by means of renewing one's relationship with God, Satan and the world.

Summary and conclusion

Through an anthropological perspective, we analysed three prayer texts from fieldwork in Church H in this article, to explore how these Chinese Christians form their subjectivities by means of prayer. In the process of subject formation, the action of subject positioning appears constantly. Subject formation is a continuous process with the ultimate purpose of concretizing the 'Person' in Christianity. In this discussion, the Christian subject is different from both social 'identity' and psychological 'ego'. It is self-conscious rather than externally obtained. The subject is clearly distinguished from the object, or 'Other'. However, it is gradually strengthened by, and even almost only exists in relationship with, the 'Other'. To achieve insight into the process of subject formation, we need to look most carefully at the religious, or devotional, practices. Prayer as an important feature of Christian devotion becomes the empirical and material basis of this article.

At the beginning of a prayer, there is commonly a self-positioning which usually comes along with praising of God. Through a description of the relationship between man and God the 'subject' is delimited accordingly. The subject itself is self-conscious and it is almost impossible to trace when and why this consciousness occurs. But we can find in the prayer texts that this subject still needs to be strengthened constantly. What is this subject indeed? In the prayer texts, the most frequently used word to refer to the subject is 'sinner'. Through the praise of God and thanksgiving, the fact of being a 'sinner' and the status of being 'unworthy' (of God's grace and so on)

is intensified. We can say that it is such a positioning of the subject that determines the subsequent content centring on 'absolution' and 'repentance'. Because of this interpretation and definition of the subject, the ultimate 'Person' acquires specific attributes as 'sinless' and 'righteous'. This discursive logic is consistent with the doctrines of Christianity. Therefore, when we discuss the diversification of Christians' religious practices, the construction of the subject and subject formation is closely related to plain doctrines. In this aspect, there seems to be a certain kind of connection between the 'religion preached' and the 'religion practised'.

After settling and strengthening the subject comes the most important segment in the process of subject formation; subject positioning and a redefinition of the relationships between subject and others. This process of subject positioning does not simply equate to the establishment of relationships between others with the subject as the very initial core. In most cases, it means to place the subject in an already existent order to complete the 'great chain'. The relationships between the subject and others are acquired through the order itself. This order, as it is presented in the prayer texts of Christianity, is what 'God's justice' refers to. For example, when asked to define or describe the relationship between believers in the same church, the texts consistently use the formulation 'in Christ' or 'in the Lord'. Thus the relationships are established through their personal relationship with God. Similarly, the devil, or Satan, also plays an important role in subject positioning among these Christians. It is almost as important to identify the subject's relationship to the devil, or more commonly, the spirit world. Satan, as a most visible symbol of disorder, or another order, is dangerous and should be avoided. Man's subjective being involves relationships with various objects, including his relationship with himself – the process of becoming self-conscious; his relationship with other people, or the establishment of his identity; his relationship with nature, and most importantly, his relationship with supernatural, namely God, Evil, Satan or the spirit world. Subject formation here is a holistic set of relationships or an integrated status according to a certain order.

The formation of the subject is ultimately the formation of the 'Person' from the Christian perspective. This word 'Person' does not have a social meaning but a philosophical and abstract one. Nor can

it be represented in baptism, serving in a church or being a pastor. Presupposing that subject formation is without a reachable destination or end, the 'Person' will never be a practical concept as 'sinless' or 'sanctified' in Christianity. In religious practices, 'sanctification' is realized through continuous confession. Among the large volume of prayer texts obtained from Church H, the major portion is composed of confessional prayers. This kind of prayer reaffirms the subject as a 'sinner' and also demonstrates the endless pursuit of 'sinlessness' and 'righteousness'.

One thing to mention here is that since the words of prayer texts have strong and obvious theological features, the process of subject formation is inevitably closely related to Christian doctrine. This could be a possible angle from which to explore the connections between Christianity as it is preached and Christianity as it is practised. However, we should still admit the limitations of the prayer texts from Church H. In fact, just as the Christianity perceived by believers in reality never fits the way it is figured in the doctrines, subject formation is never solely an internalization of doctrine. Yet the discourse or the speeches and words can easily be shaped by doctrine. Christians from Church H only choose the words and phrases from within a Christian canon to express their thoughts and ideas. In another church, Christians may use words derived from completely different discourse but also within Christianity in their prayers. Therefore, the greatest limitation of the study presented in this article still concerns these texts. What we presuppose about these texts, how they are produced and why they are presented in the ways they are greatly affects the premise of this analysis. Various texts and discourses may result in various interpretations of subject-formation processes. Yet, however specific words and sentences may change, prayer, as a form of expression, has its fixed discursive structure and narrative pattern, both of which are key to forming an insight into the subject formation of Christians.

A discussion of Christianity in China cannot bypass the discussion of Chinese Christians. However, just like Christianity, the Christian subject is a concept of possibly the broadest meaning. How can fixed and textualized doctrines relate to the diverse contextualized practices actually performed by various Christians? Moreover, how can we understand these various Christians? Focusing on devotion as religious practice and the process of subject forma-

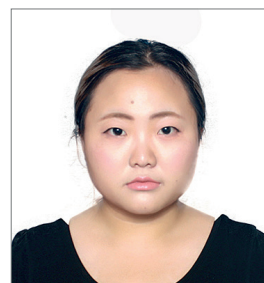
tion through prayers, which is also the process of 'becoming Christian', we can infer that in this process doctrinal Christianity and practised Christianity are possibly connected to each other. Therefore, the discussion of subject formation is a tentative exploration of how this connection is made possible in contemporary China. ■



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